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AARP Oregon Supports HB 2173 and HB 2184 – Expanding Broadband

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TO: House Committee on Economic Development, Rep. Lively, Chair

FROM: Jon Bartholomew, Government Relations Director, AARP Oregon

AARP Oregon supports both HB 2173 and HB 2184 because they will lead to improved access to telehealth services for Oregonians in rural and frontier areas of our state.

Oregon has a great need for expanded telehealth services, especially in rural and frontier regions of the state. According to a [2017 report by the Oregon Health and Sciences University \(OHSU\)](#), the drive time for Oregonians to the nearest primary care provider can be as much as 81 minutes in one direction. Distances and drive times are even longer for specialty care, such as geriatricians, neurologists, and cardiologists.

A 2018 AARP survey found that it takes **rural caregivers** (52%) longer to get themselves or their loved ones **to a medical specialist** (over 45 minutes) than it does **urban caregivers** (17%).

In support of the value of telehealth services, [The AARP Policy Book states](#):

Services provided by telehealth have great potential to help consumers more easily connect with various health care clinicians, maintain their quality of life, and remain in their communities longer by providing an opportunity to manage their care. Tele-health gives people the ability to schedule health-related appointments, request prescription refills, can remind them to take medications, and serves as a method to link to a health care provider when time or distance is a barrier. Telehealth can also support family caregivers' efforts to take care of their loved ones.

Rural counties of Oregon tend to have an older population. A [map provided by The Oregon Office of Rural Health](#) from data compiled by the Portland State University Population center shows that the average age in the urban counties is significantly lower than that in the most rural counties.

AARP
Real Possibilities

To access telehealth, rural Oregon will need expanded broadband capacity. As noted in [an article in the Oregonian](#), rural Oregonians are both less likely to have broadband in their home, and their internet speeds are lower. Oregon has had an [Oregon Broadband Advisory Council](#) (OBAC), but its role is limited to studying issues, coordinating stakeholders, and making recommendations.

House Bill 2173 would establish a new Oregon Broadband Office. It would provide the new office with more power to take action on the state strategy than OBAC has. AARP believes that this would elevate the ability of the state to expand broadband to underserved areas.

We see House Bill 2184 as a companion bill to HB 2173. It expands the Oregon Universal Service Surcharge to include mobile phones. The bill creates a Broadband Fund that the new Oregon Broadband Office (assuming HB 2173 passes) would use to target broadband expansion in rural areas. The [AARP Policy Book](#) supports using the USF for broadband purposes. The federal USF already is charged to mobile phone users, and by expanding the base it will establish a more equitable funding source for broadband expansion. The [AARP principles for taxation](#) notes that “a balance must be struck between using the tax system to address social policy goals ... and raising adequate revenues simply and *equitably*.”

Because of the positive impact on access to telehealth, AARP Oregon urges you to support both HB 2173 and HB 2184.

AARP is the nation’s largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With 510,000 members in Oregon, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment.